

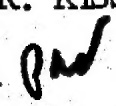
MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SECRETARMY review
completed.
INFORMATION

May 15, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Phil Odeen 

SUBJECT: Vietnam and Cambodia

A member of my staff, John Bushnell, just returned from two weeks in SEA. He reports the following:

Vietnam Military Matters

Maneuver battalion manpower strength is a critical problem. If maneuver battalions were at 90% of authorized strength instead of 65%, ARVN would have nearly 50% more men to engage the enemy in this offensive. Present for combat strength is 15 to 25 percentage points below assigned strength because many troops are detailed to non-combat duties, including unit farms and other irregular activities as well as the usual leave and training. ARVN maneuver battalions were below 50% present for combat at the end of March.

The 21st Division's lack of aggressiveness can in large part be traced to personnel shortages. Some men were left behind when the unit moved out of the Delta and desertions have been heavy since they were sent to MR-3. As a result, the maneuver battalions are at 35 to 40% of authorized strength.

Fortunately, the training system was full when the offensive began because the GVN finally began to act on the personnel shortage last December. The training cycle has been shortened from 12 to 9 weeks with a substantial one-time flow to units. About 36,000 men per month are coming out of the training system. But only a third are sent to maneuver battalions, and this is probably less than needed to replace casualties and desertions. Permission has been given to use RF trainees to fill ARVN units but this authority has not yet been used (about 13,000 replacements are being sent to the RF monthly).

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The GVN is trying a number of quick fixes such as releasing prisoners for assignment to front line divisions and the drafting of 17 year olds to keep the training camps full. The universities are being closed but it is not clear how many of the students will be drafted for combat units.

There has still been no basic reform of the GVN military personnel system. Once assigned to a combat unit, the man stays there until he is wounded, killed, or reaches age 40. Units do much of their own recruiting. Support units (two-thirds of ARVN) fill all requirements with volunteers and once in a support unit you are safe from combat duty. Nothing effective has yet been done to draft the estimated 130,000 draft dodgers in PSDF units or the 250,000 with various other deferments.

What is needed is a system which directs most young men through a couple of years in a combat unit with support and local units being staffed by those having served a combat tour. MACV does not feel this is the time to raise such basic reform, although several offices in the Embassy feel this is the single most important reform Thieu could implement under the special powers. It would be popular with most of the people but not with many of Thieu's closest supporters who benefit from running the present system (e. g. , pay for deferments).

Leadership changes have been for the better. But they are late and still too few. We need to press for more changes.

The President's actions against NVN have greatly encouraged the GVN. Thieu's initial response has been to be more positive and aggressive. But there is danger the GVN will tend to await the fruits of U.S. actions instead of doing everything it can to defeat the enemy. Bunker is aware of this problem.

The Economy

The offensive is contributing to a recession resulting from the rapid reduction of U.S. employment and the higher exchange rates of last November. People will accept the lower per capita consumption levels caused by the reductions of U.S. economic support and the offensive because of the military situation. But continued rapid

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reductions of U.S. economic support in 1973 and beyond would put severe strains on Thieu as per capita consumption would continue to decline.

Cambodia

The Cambodian situation is depressing. The only thing functioning well is our MAP delivery system. The GKR is paying about 240,000 men; we are providing equipment and supplies for 220,000; FANK actual strength is estimated at about 150,000. Lack of knowledge about actual strength or effectiveness of its units is a major factor making the GKR reluctant to move units to reinforce attacked positions or to initiate any actions. The GKR is increasingly drawing in to try to protect the capitol and a few major towns.

Establishing an adequate personnel recruitment, training, control system is obviously highest priority. Lon Nol has just agreed to move ahead. A few people will be needed in our MEDT to help. It is unlikely that an effective system can be established to bring FANK to the planned 220,000 level for a considerable period. For the next year we must cross our fingers that the enemy does not devote many resources to Cambodia.

cc: Dick Kennedy
John Negroponte

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